

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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KDE/KBE DEVELOP ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY POSITION PAPER

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) – The Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Board of Education have released a position paper outlining strategies for the future of the state's public school assessment and accountability system.

The document includes a call for higher, clearer, fewer and narrower academic standards, which will lead to the development of tests that provide valuable data for many stakeholders. It is a collaborative effort that contains input from many sources, including state associations and groups.

To comply with state and federal mandates, Kentucky's public schools participate in the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), which includes:

- Kentucky Core Content Tests, standards-based assessments in seven content areas
- Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS), the ACT, EXPLORE and PLAN tests
- nonacademic data (dropout, graduation, retention, attendance and transition to adult life rates)
- alternate assessments for highly disabled students

CATS provides data used to determine school and district progress in meeting unique goals. Information from CATS also is used to comply with the mandates of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

The position paper is designed to provide guidance as the state moves to the next generation of assessment and accountability. Five key principles guided the development of this document:

1. Development of standards must happen before the selection or creation of the assessment.
2. The annual state assessment system must provide diagnostic, longitudinal growth data and overall proficiency levels at the individual student level.
3. The annual state assessment must measure both the knowledge and higher-level thinking required by the standards.
4. The annual state assessment should be built to support interim and classroom assessments.
5. Accountability is necessary for ongoing educational improvement.

The full position paper is attached.

(more)

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The Next Era in Kentucky Educational Progress

A position paper from the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Board of Education

Executive Summary

Kentucky's educational progress depends on a strong, valid and reliable system of assessment and accountability. The development of higher, clearer, fewer and narrower academic standards is just the first step in a process that will lead to a system that provides valuable, usable data for many stakeholders. A robust, viable system will maintain Kentucky's work to lead students to proficiency and beyond.

This position paper outlines the state's plan and vision for the next generation of assessment and accountability. It is a collaborative effort among many groups and individuals, and it contains input from many sources.

Five key principles guided the development of this document:

6. Development of standards must happen before the selection or creation of the assessment.
7. The annual state assessment system must provide diagnostic, longitudinal growth data and overall proficiency levels at the individual student level.
8. The annual state assessment must measure both the knowledge and higher-level thinking required by the standards.
9. The annual state assessment should be built to support interim and classroom assessments.
10. Accountability is necessary for ongoing educational improvement.

The goal of this document is to provide a framework upon which Kentucky's student, school and district assessment and accountability system can be designed.

A Call to Action

The world Kentucky students face when they leave our classrooms today is drastically different from the one high school graduates encountered nearly two decades ago when the state's 20th-century educational reforms were first enacted. It is time to make significant changes to the educational system to ensure that every Kentucky student acquires the skills required in the 21st century to be successful in the global economy.

A comprehensive and well-balanced assessment system that assures concrete knowledge, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability and initiative – skills that are crucial to today's success – can serve as the engine that drives progress into the next era. This assessment system must meet the many requirements outlined by state and federal law -- specifically, the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, on which at least \$214 million in federal funding hinges -- and provide balanced assessment and accountability. The work begins with a well-planned standards revision process followed immediately by teacher training and, ultimately, the revision of curriculum and instructional practices.

To that end, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) stands ready to meet these new challenges and design the next generation of standards, assessment and accountability.

Streamlined Educational Standards, Beginning with Mathematics

At the heart of the needed changes is a hard look at the curriculum standards that are currently in place. While these content standards were revised as recently as 2006, recent developments and research, especially in mathematics, call for immediate action.

The Kentucky Department of Education has been involved in various initiatives through several national organizations that have all led to the same definitive conclusion: ***Focus and improvement is needed in mathematics standards and assessments to better enable students to succeed in the international economy of the 21st century.***

KDE agrees with the assertion from recent publications, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' (NCTM) *Curriculum Focal Points for Prekindergarten through Grade 8 Mathematics*, that "lacking clear, consistent priorities and focus, teachers stretch to find the time to present important mathematical topics effectively and in depth." KDE contends that this is the case across all content areas, but agrees that mathematics is the area of most urgent concern and the place to begin standards revision.

KDE is working with a 15-state consortium facilitated by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to complete a ***fast-track revision process*** that will bring truly internationally benchmarked mathematics and language arts (reading and writing) standards to every Kentucky classroom. This provides Kentucky with the opportunity to have national and international comparisons of students' progress toward common standards.

This work will answer the call from Kentucky legislators and policymakers, the Kentucky Committee on Mathematics Achievement, the Commissioner's Task Force on Assessment and Accountability, Achieve, Inc., the American Diploma Project, NCTM, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel and others for more streamlined mathematics and language arts standards that can, in turn, be assessed authentically within a balanced assessment system.

This process will ensure that all content standards taught in Kentucky classrooms are:

- **Higher**
 - articulating what students need to know to be successful in college and career (beyond four years of college)
 - using national and international benchmarks so that citizens can compete in the global economy and educators can compare Kentucky students' performance to the world
 - including an analysis of the challenges and development of student thought processes during learning
- **Clearer**
 - communicating in a format teachers, students, families and citizens can understand
 - including learning targets and progressions, enabling teachers to know when students have achieved standards
- **Fewer/Narrower**
 - focusing main standards through a judicious process using research-based evidence
 - fitting within the instructional timeframe of Kentucky's school calendar and reducing testing time

The process will begin immediately with mathematics and language arts. Within 24 months, the necessary instructional resources and resulting assessments will be in place.

The Next Era in Kentucky Assessment and Accountability

In addition to the need for higher, clearer and fewer curriculum standards, KDE also understands that lessons learned in the area of testing clearly call upon Kentucky to rethink the state's assessment and accountability system. The Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS), and the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) before it, met the needs for school accountability during their times. It's now time for Kentucky to move toward a system that more clearly impacts daily classroom instruction, motivates students for individual success, provides longitudinal measures that give clear feedback to educators and families and also can supply the accountability measures taxpayers deserve and citizens expect.

Kentucky's opportunity to build the next generation of assessment must rely on five guiding principles.

1. Development of standards must happen before the selection or creation of the assessment.

A fundamental step in designing a state assessment system is to first develop the standards that need to be taught and mastered in each grade level and in each content area. In order to have a coherent statewide system, it is imperative that standards drive the choices made about testing and not vice versa. After standards are set, test questions specifically tied to those can be developed. The standards should be vertically aligned and developmental in nature to provide high-quality longitudinal growth data.

By developing standards first, the state clearly articulates the expectations that each student must meet. Once the standards are in place, the assessment system then measures how well students perform against its state standards. The main type of test used to measure standards must be a standards-based or criterion-referenced assessment. This type of assessment provides specific details about how students meet specific standards. A criterion-referenced/standards-based test is designed ultimately to allow all students to meet the criteria, unlike a norm-referenced assessment that is designed primarily to rank-order students.

2. The annual state assessment system must provide diagnostic, longitudinal growth data and overall proficiency levels at the individual student level, as well as school and district accountability.

The annual state assessment will provide scores that answer two questions:

1. How well does the student perform overall in a content area?
2. How well does the student perform on selected standards/objectives?

The proficiency-level score helps meet federal guidelines and provides information about how students perform on state goals. The diagnostic information is more useful at the classroom level to help teachers identify general areas of weakness and strength in their curricula. Also, it provides information for the student and family about areas of strength or weakness. Diagnostic information provides as many details as possible. For instance, diagnostic information may be able to provide summaries of the misconceptions students exhibit when they choose certain answers on the test. This type of information is useful to help teachers make instructional change in the classroom. Ideally, a significant number of items must be released to teachers and administrators each year so that they can use in-depth item analysis methodologies to further refine instruction and address the individual learning needs of students.

In order to provide both proficiency level and diagnostic scores, the state assessment system would need to be linked to a clear set of fewer and focused standards that could be measured in an end-of-year test. In addition, the test would need to use the same items for all students in order to determine the individual student level diagnostics. A single test for all students, rather than multiple forms, would be required.

3. The annual state assessment must measure both the knowledge and higher-level thinking required by the standards.

The state annual assessment must span the spectrum of thinking skills from knowledge retrieval to solving complex problems. The test must incorporate both multiple choice questions and constructed response items (short answer, extended answer, open response). Multiple choice questions are valuable for their ability to judge knowledge and comprehension. Constructed response items provide a way to measure higher levels of thinking.

KDE and KBE will investigate appropriate means of assessing content-area knowledge:

- using programmatic assessments for arts & humanities
- reviewing the practical living/vocational studies assessment
- reviewing assessments for children with disabilities (while meeting requirements of NCLB and IDEA)
- reconsidering the 4th-grade portfolio to determine if it is the best approach to measure writing instruction at the elementary level

4. The annual state assessment should be built to support interim and classroom assessments.

By creating an annual state assessment based on fewer, narrower and focused standards, the state system will help support the development of interim and classroom measures, resulting in a balanced assessment system that provides ongoing instructional information to teachers, principals, students and families.

An annual state assessment alone cannot provide the type of ongoing information needed by teachers to help students learn. Once-a-year results are important, but the most valuable assessments are those that occur more frequently. Two general types of assessment are needed:

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- Interim assessments are formal tests, aligned with the defined standards, given throughout the year (two to four times) and help predict performance on the state’s annual assessment and provide diagnostic information.
- Classroom assessments gather ongoing data and provide the frequent feedback critical to improving instruction and improving student achievement.

Interim and classroom assessments must be clearly linked to the state’s educational standards and the annual assessment. By creating a balanced assessment system, classroom, district and state assessments are aligned and support each other. The interim and classroom assessments must be supported by the state through the creation of standards and resources to bolster instruction around those standards.

5. Accountability is necessary for ongoing educational improvement.

Accountability is an evolving experience that is aimed at improving learning and accelerating academic progress. Accountability has improved Kentucky’s national educational standings. Prior to the accountability system in the 1990s, Kentucky was frequently cited as near last in academic achievement nationwide. During this 18-year effort to improve Kentucky’s educational system, Kentucky has moved from last to middle of the pack. There is still a long way to go and much work to be done, but accountability did ignite change.

The next generation of assessment in Kentucky must include accountability to improve the achievement levels of every student. The fundamental principle of accountability is to motivate students, educators and the public to continually improve Kentucky’s educational system. The accountability model should include both academic and nonacademic indicators (graduation, retention, dropout and other rates) and focus on school and student growth.

With the creation of more narrow and concise standards aligned across years, it will be possible to move Kentucky to a longitudinal growth model that looks at how much academic growth occurs for each student and then factors that growth into the accountability system. In this method, there is an incentive to improve every student’s achievement level. A successful longitudinal system calls for the creation of a sound set of subject matter standards aligned vertically and running through courses from elementary to high school. By aligning the tests across years, student performance can be tracked over time.

Moving to the Next Generation

As we move to the next generation of standards and the resulting state assessment package, we must consider many dimensions. Decisions must take into account the need to meet federal guidelines concerning state assessments. Those guidelines require federal approval prior to a state receiving its Title I allocation, and the guidelines are not trivial.

The next generation of assessment and accountability must be a coherent, time-saving system that provides quick turnaround and balances:

- reading, mathematics tested once a year in grades 3–8 and once in high school (as required by NCLB)
- science, writing and social studies tested at least once each at elementary, middle and high school
- EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT in grades 8, 10 and 11 for college readiness and national comparison information

In addition, a realistic timeline is necessary to ensure success. KDE calls for work to begin immediately on mathematics standards that could be ready by January 2010 and a mathematics test ready for use by spring 2011. Other content areas could begin work for phase-in beginning spring 2012. By phasing in different content areas, it may be possible to maintain the accountability trend line to meet the current requirements of NCLB by 2014.

Improvement in instruction does not happen through the revision to standards and assessment alone; it requires professional resources and training. An investment in teacher knowledge and expertise will produce positive change in student learning. The Kentucky Department of Education, in collaboration with educational cooperatives, postsecondary institutions and other networks, will make this investment through professional growth opportunities. Priority needs in the areas of assessment literacy and high-quality instruction will be addressed that enable Kentucky educators to effectively utilize Kentucky's new standards within a balanced assessment system.

Achieving the next era in Kentucky's educational progress will call for new funding allocations. Initially, the collaborative revision of mathematics and language arts standards will require KDE staff to attend the Council of Chief State School Officers' national meetings and to visit partnering states. Implementing the research that is necessary to evaluate instructional progress in Kentucky will require measures beyond state and national assessments; therefore, tools such as the national Survey of Enacted Curriculum will need to be implemented throughout the state in order to better measure the instructional progress that Kentucky teachers are making as they implement the new standards. Additional standards development in content areas beyond mathematics and language arts will require partnerships that extend beyond the CCSSO network. KDE must collaborate with other state departments of education and with international experts in standards development in the effort to focus instruction and balanced assessment on international standards.

The assessment development will be dependent on the standards and the ultimate test design. Some of the early work of a developer, if needed, will overlap the work of the current system of assessment, thus calling for temporary, additional money to fund the simultaneous efforts.

Conclusion

To ensure that Kentucky's assessment and accountability system provides valuable instructional information and reliable data, it must be refocused. The development of higher, clearer, fewer and narrower academic standards, starting with mathematics, will be the starting point.

Five principles should guide this process:

1. Development of standards must happen before the selection or creation of the assessment.
2. The annual state assessment system must provide diagnostic, longitudinal growth data and overall proficiency levels at the individual student level.
3. The annual state assessment must measure both the knowledge and higher-level thinking required by the standards.
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5. Accountability is necessary for ongoing educational improvement.

Kentucky is poised to move forward in the area of standards revision, particularly in the area of mathematics. This work must have one overriding goal – to ensure that the state's standards, assessment and accountability all focus on what is best for every child in the public school setting.

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